

Sustainability is more than just being 'green'

Sustainable development means taking into account the social, economic and environmental impacts of business activities, not only for the present but also for future generations. Although many business leaders have already started to think about taking a "greener" approach, they often fail to realise the significant social impact their business can have both in the UK and globally. Taking sustainability seriously means that business leaders need to be responsive to the needs of a wide range of stakeholders and communities, all with competing interests. So how can these leaders effectively adapt their operations in order to become more sustainable?

One definition for sustainability is: "Meeting our needs while not compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs" (Brundtland Commission). However, many in the industry believe that a triple bottom line better describes sustainability. The triple bottom line goes by a few different names, 3P's (people, planet, profit), 3E's (equality, environment, economy) or economic, social and environmental. The miss-conception that many leaders have is that the three elements need to be compromised against each other, where as in reality long-term sustainability needs to encompass all three.

To tackle all three "E's", sustainable thinking and practices have to be built into the way the business is managed and reflected in the way decisions are made. Longer term sustainable development objectives should be backed up with short term targets and action plans. Leaders need to think beyond the 'five year plan' and start looking at the impact their business will make fifty years down the line, and then translate that into policies and practices that filter all the way through their organisations.

Tackling sustainability head on will undoubtedly enhance the competitive stance and environmental credibility of an organisation. Customers, employees and stakeholders are increasingly demanding transparent business practices, both regarding workplace standards and the wider impact the business has on society, climate change and the environment. They want evidence of changing practices that demonstrate an organisation's sustainability credentials; it's not just about "talking the talk" it's about "walking the walk".

So how can you tackle sustainability head on?

Management system standards will help organisations adapt and evolve the way the business operates. They provide a robust framework for good practice to ensure an

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organisation has an enduring and balanced approach to economic activity, environmental responsibility and social progress.

An organisation can demonstrate its commitment to a more sustainable future by adopting a management system standard such as ISO 14001, the standard for environmental management. Such a standard will encourage the business to follow a common 'plan-do-check-act' approach, which incorporates three phases:

1. Planning – an organisation needs to define its policy and commitment to sustainable development. Stakeholders and sustainability issues are required to be identified and key performance indicators for improved event sustainability are set.
2. Implementation – this phase requires an organisation to define responsibilities, ensure staff are sufficiently trained and competent and provide sufficient resources to implement and operate a new management system. It also requires it to manage its supply chain.
3. Check and review – the final phase is about monitoring, measuring and evaluating in relation to the management system and the objectives set, and then taking action to continually improve performance.

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Proving you can 'walk the walk'

Regulatory and competitive pressures combined with growing stakeholder expectations demand transparent, robust and objective reporting. But without independent assessment and assurance, even the most rigorous sustainability report may lack credibility. In this case your 'green' efforts would not be fully recognised – or rewarded. Presenting evidence of new ways of working through a new management framework can offer the following business benefits:

- **Increased stakeholder trust and confidence**
- **Increased interested from potential shareholders**
- **Competitive edge**
- **Improved efficiency and reduce costs**
- **Protection of brand and reputation**
- **Accelerated decision making**

In conclusion, the key to sustainable development is to integrate the delivery of economic development, social progress and environmental quality – all of which can be achieved by providing a roadmap delivered through management systems standards.

For further information about how you can address this very relevant business issue and build a greener business, visit www.bsigroup.co.uk/sustainability

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- The development and sale of private, national and international standards and supporting information that promote and share best practice
- Second and third-party management systems assessment and certification in all critical areas of management disciplines
- Product testing and certification of services and products including Kitemark®, one of the one of the world's most recognised quality symbols
- Certification of high-risk, complex medical devices
- Performance management software solutions
- Training services in support of standards implementation and business best practice.

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